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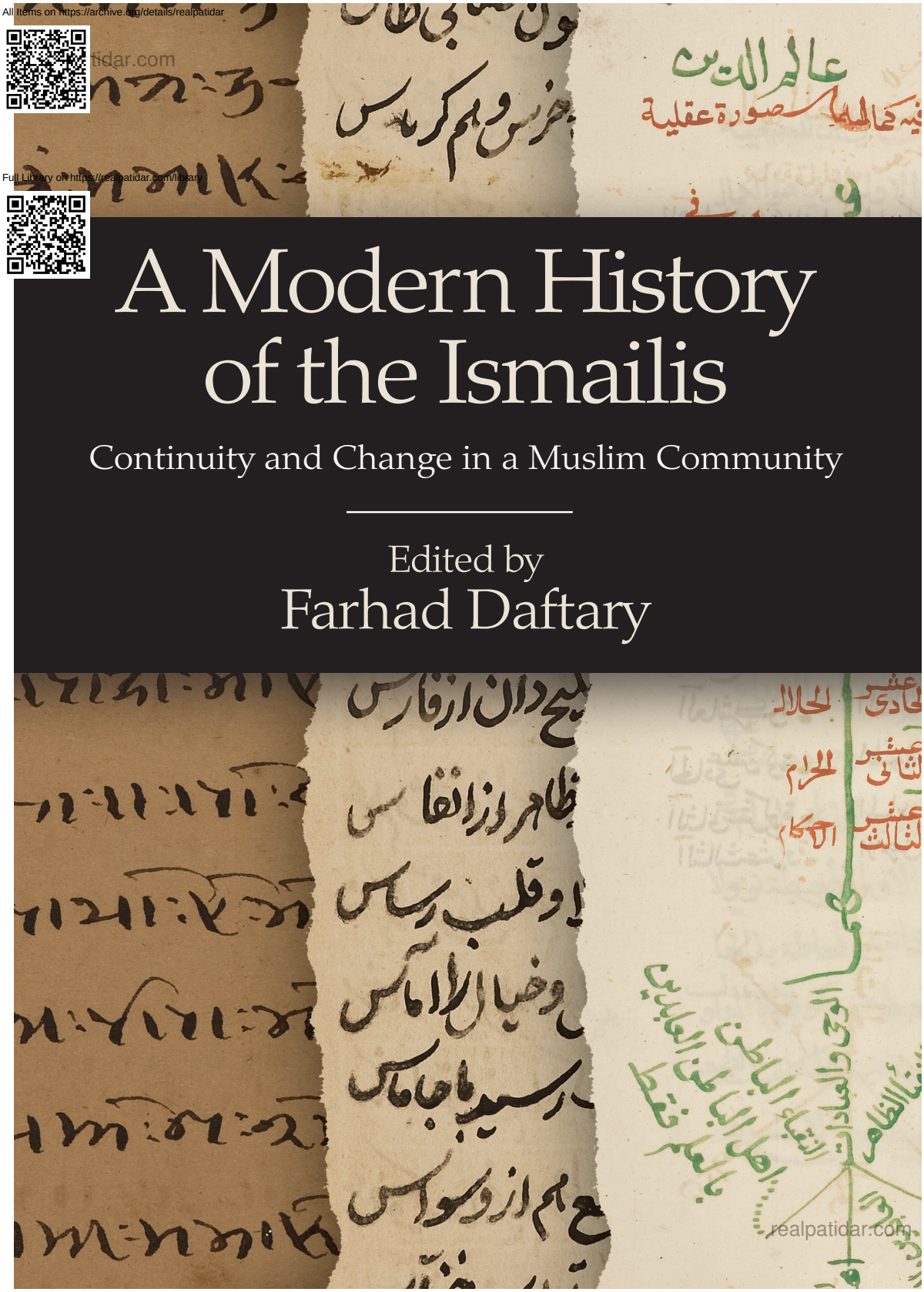

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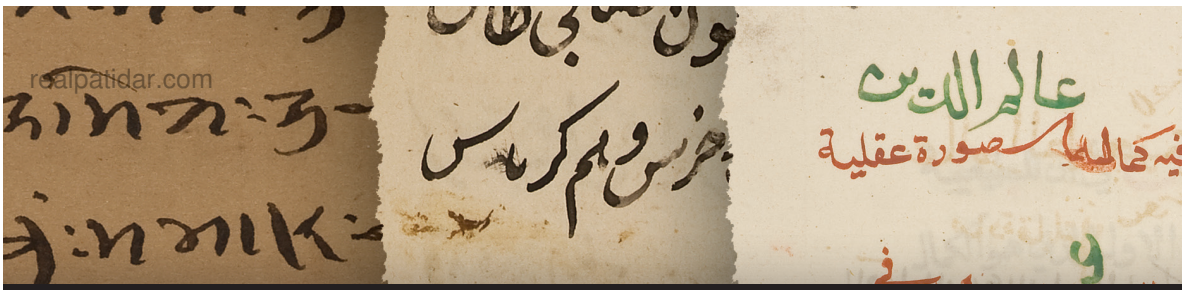
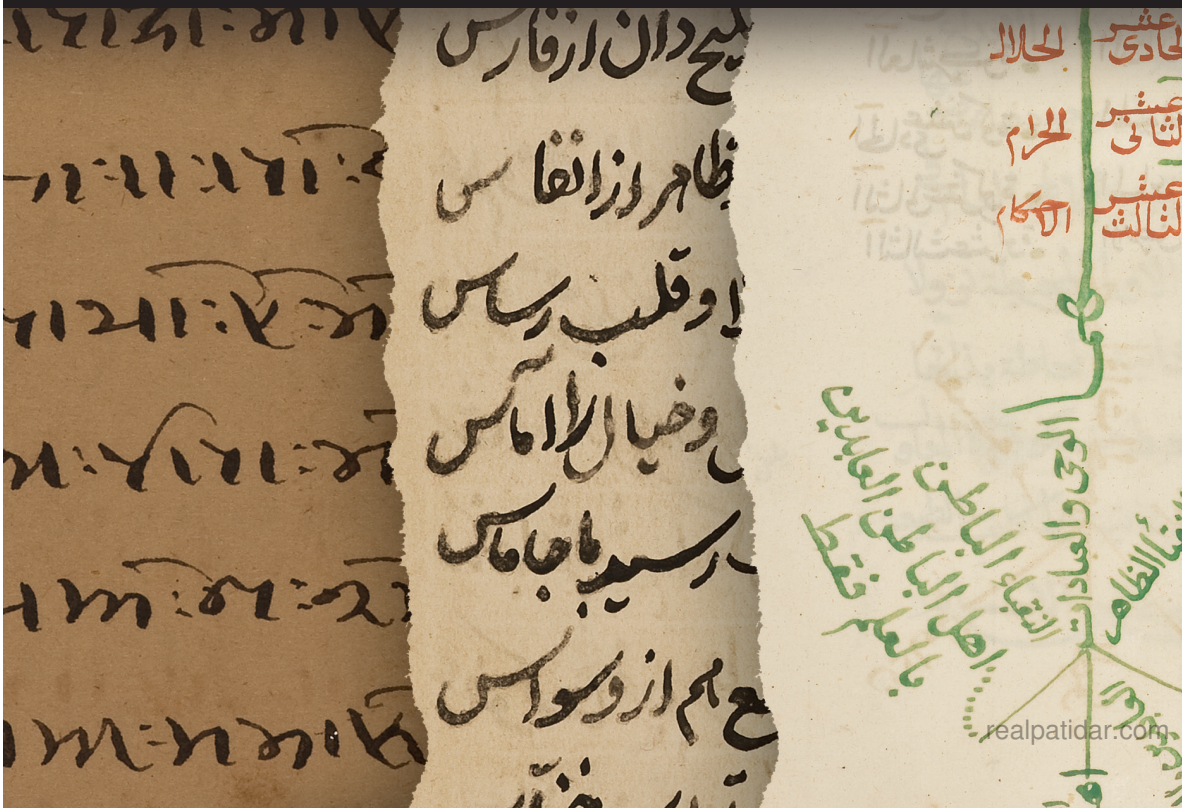


A Modern History of the Ismailis

Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community

Edited by

Farhad Daftary



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not been sufficiently studied due to a scarcity of reliable primary source materials. More complex research difficulties arise from the widespread practice of *taqiyya*, or precautionary dissimulation of true religious beliefs and identity, by the Nizari communities of different regions during the greater part of this period when they were obliged to dissimulate under a variety of disguises, such as Sufi, Sunni, Twelver Shiʿi and Hindu, against rampant persecution.

In the aftermath of the destruction of their state, the Nizari Imams went into hiding and, for the most part, lost their direct contact with their followers. The scattered Nizari communities now developed independently under their local leaders designated as *pir*s, *mir*s and *shaykh*s. But by the middle of the 15th century, the Nizari Imams had emerged in Anjudan in central Persia, initiating what has been called the Anjudan revival in Nizari *daʿwa* and literary activities.[13] During the Anjudan period, which lasted about two centuries, the Imams reasserted their central authority over the various Nizari communities. The Nizari *daʿwa* activities now proved particularly successful in Badakhshan in Central Asia, and in the Indian subcontinent where large numbers of Hindus were converted and became locally known as Khojas. The Khojas developed a unique literary genre in the form of devotional hymns known as *ginan*s, while the Nizari tradition elaborated there became designated as Satpanth or the 'true path' (to salvation).

The modern period in Nizari history may be dated to the middle of the 19th century when the residence of the Imams was transferred from Persia to India and subsequently to Europe. On the death of the 45th Nizari Imam, Shah Khalil Allah, in 1817, his eldest son Hasan ʿAli Shah (born in 1804) succeeded to the Imamate as the 46th Imam. Fath ʿAli Shah (1797–1834), the then reigning Qajar monarch of Persia, appointed the youthful Imam to the governorship of Qum and gave him one of his daughters, Sarv-i Jahan Khanum, in marriage. In addition, the Persian monarch bestowed upon the Nizari Imam the honorific title (*laqab*) of Agha Khan, meaning lord and master. Henceforth, Hasan ʿAli Shah became known in Persia as Agha Khan Mahallati, because of his royal title and the family's deep roots in the Mahallat area and its environs (Anjudan and Kahak); the title of Agha Khan, later simplified to Aga Khan, has been used on a hereditary basis by Hasan ʿAli Shah's successors to the Nizari Ismaili Imamate.

Aga Khan I lived a quiet life in Persia, honoured and highly respected at the Qajar court for the remainder of Fath ʿAli Shah's reign. The next Qajar monarch, Muhammad Shah (1834–1848), appointed the Imam to

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the governorship of the province of Kirman in 1835. This post had been held earlier for almost half a century by the Imam's grandfather who was the 44th Imam, Abu'l-Hasan ʿAli (d. 1792). Subsequently, the Imam faced a series of confrontations with the Qajar court and the enmity of the all-powerful grand vizier. Relations between the Imam himself and the Qajar establishment deteriorated, resulting in a number of military encounters in 1840. The Ismaili forces, led by the Imam and his brothers Sardar Abu'l-Hasan Khan (d. 1880) and Muhammad Baqir Khan (d. 1879), were eventually defeated by the superior Qajar armies.[14] As a result, in 1841 the Imam was obliged to flee to neighbouring Afghanistan, marking the end of the Persian period of the Nizari Ismaili Imamate which had lasted some seven centuries from the start of the Alamut era.

Accompanied by a large retinue as well as his cavalry, the Nizari Imam then advanced to Qandahar, which had been occupied in 1839 by an Anglo-Indian army. Henceforth, a close association developed between the Aga Khan and the British Raj. Subsequently, in 1842, the Imam proceeded to Sind and stayed at Jerruck (now in Pakistan), where his house is still preserved. From the time of his arrival in Sind, Aga Khan I established extensive contacts with his Khoja followers. In 1844 the Imam left Sind and after spending a year in Gujarat among his followers arrived in Bombay in 1846. British interventions for the Imam's return to his Persian ancestral homeland, as was the Imam's personal desire, failed, and, after an interim stay in Calcutta, the Aga Khan settled permanently in Bombay in 1848.

With Aga Khan I's settlement in Bombay there began the modern period in the history of the Nizari Ismailis. The Nizari Imamate was now established in India, with Bombay serving as the seat of the Nizari Imams. Hasan ʿAli Shah, Aga Khan I, was the first Nizari Imam to set foot in India and his presence there was greatly welcomed by the Ismaili Khojas who gathered enthusiastically to pay their homage to him and receive his blessings. The Imam soon established elaborate headquarters and residences in Bombay, Poona and Bangalore. He attended the chief *jamaʿatkhana* in Bombay on special religious occasions.

Aga Khan I spent the last three decades of his eventful and long Imamate in Bombay. As the spiritual head of a Muslim community, he received the protection of the British establishment in India, which strengthened his position. Nevertheless Aga Khan I encountered some difficulties in establishing his authority over the Khoja community. The South Asian Nizari tradition known as Satpanth had become influenced over time by elements of Hindu practice, while the Khojas had been obliged to dissimulate for long periods as Sunnis or Twelver Shiʿis, also having close ties

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From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim: The Articulation of Ismaili Khoja Identity in South Asia[1]

Ali S. Asani

The historian Bernard Lewis writes that in the course of its evolution, Ismailism 'has meant different things at different times and places'.[2] A principal reason for the multivalent significance of the tradition has been its remarkable ability to adapt to different contexts and circumstances. Depending on the historical period and geographical/cultural location, Ismaili intellectuals, poets and preachers have expressed the central doctrines of their faith in terms of various theological and philosophical approaches. In the late 10th and early 11th centuries, for example, Fatimid Ismaili thinkers engaged in a philosophical synthesis of Neoplatonic and Gnostic elements to elaborate Islamic and, specifically, Ismaili ideas.[3] As a consequence of centuries-old processes of acculturation to varying milieus, Ismaili communities have come to display a significant degree of diversity in their beliefs and practices. Indeed the 48th Imam of the Nizari Ismailis, Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, commenting on the pliable nature of Ismailism, observed that the tradition has survived 'because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook. There have really been no cut-and-dried rules.'[4]

Some scholars have attributed this Ismaili tendency to acculturate to different contexts to the doctrine of *taqiyya*, the strategy traditionally used by various Shi'i groups to hide or camouflage their religious beliefs in order to escape persecution. Historically the Ismailis rank among the most frequently persecuted minorities of the Muslim world, often forced into 'an underground existence'.[5] During certain historical periods, the intensity with which they were persecuted was such that entire communities were wiped out. One is reminded of the infamous edict of the Mongol ruler Genghis Khan against Ismailis, as reported by the Persian historian

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Juwayni, in which he commanded that 'none of that people should be spared, not even the babe in its cradle'.[6] Yet it is also evident that the impulse to acculturate is innate to the ethos of Ismailism. A distinctive element contributing to this ethos is the strong emphasis on the *batin* (the spiritual and esoteric) over the *zahir* (the physical and exoteric). As a result, the Ismailis have been called the *batiniyya*, 'the followers of the esoteric, the inner'. This has meant that externals of culture, such as language or dress, have not been considered essential to Ismaili articulations of faith and identity.

Central to Ismaili traditions of esotericism has been the notion that a single spiritual reality underlies what may appear externally to be starkly different and disparate doctrines and creeds. As a result Ismailism has been able to respond to cultural diversity by tolerating, in the words of Paul E. Walker, 'a surprising intellectual flexibility and leeway'.[7] The motivation to integrate, reformulate and acculturate to different environments is hence part of the Ismaili legacy.[8] One of the consequences of this legacy is that during many periods of their history, the religious identity of many Ismaili communities was often ambiguous and difficult to define, since they drew upon and integrated many different kinds of ideology.[9] For instance, Ismaili authors in Persia and Central Asia from the 15th century onwards used the prevailing Sufi discourses to explain their doctrines, resulting in a style that Wladimir Ivanow, the prominent scholar of Ismaili history, described as 'Sufico-Ismaili' because it created ambiguities not only regarding the religious affiliation of authors of the treatises, but about doctrinal issues as well.[10]

Not surprisingly, ambiguity of identity has been a prominent characteristic of Nizari Ismaili communities in the western regions of the Indian subcontinent, namely Punjab, Sind, Gujarat and Rajasthan. According to community traditions, the emergence and development of the Nizari Ismaili tradition was associated with various *pirs* and *sayyids* who from the 11th century onwards were entrusted with the responsibility of propagating Ismaili doctrines in the area on behalf of the Ismaili Imams residing in Iran. Significantly these *pirs* and *sayyids* referred to their teachings as *satpanth*, 'the true path'. Hence their followers identified themselves as Satpanthis rather than Ismailis. The Satpanth tradition employed terms and ideas from a variety of Indic religious and philosophical currents, such as the Bhakti, Sant, Sufi, Vaishnavite and yogic traditions to articulate its core concepts.[11]

Hindu terms used

This chapter explores the processes by which the identity of a group of Satpanthis, called the Khojas, originally members of a small mercantile

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caste in western India, was gradually transformed over a period of some 150 years so that a significant number today regard themselves as Shi'i Muslims, specifically Nizari Ismailis, members of a transnational religious community led by the Aga Khans. In the pre-modern period, the Khojas were, to use Faisal Devji's apt description, simultaneously 'a Vaishnav *panth*, a Sufi order, a trader's guild and a caste'.[12] In the 19th and early 20th centuries, however, the presence of all these various strands became problematic for them as new socio-political frameworks, which were associated with the establishment of British imperial rule and the emergence of religiously based nationalisms, became increasingly dominant in South Asia. In a tense and polarized atmosphere in which notions of religious identity and the categories 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' were contested and also rigidly and narrowly demarcated, the Khojas, like many other Indian communities, were pressured to reshape their identity to better conform to externally defined norms. To complicate matters, internal dissent among the Khojas over issues of authority and governance led to intervention by the judicial system of British India. As a result, schisms developed among the Khojas and they splintered along religious (Hindu/Muslim) as well as sectarian (Sunni/Shi'i) lines. For those Khojas who in the aftermath of these divisions came to identify themselves as Ismailis, the Aga Khans employed the sanction of their office as hereditary Shi'i Imams (spiritual leaders) to affect the process of transforming Khoja identity from an Indic caste to Muslim denomination.[13] The story of the Khojas is narrated from two perspectives: first, by exploring their identity within the changing landscapes of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial South Asia and, second, by examining the impact of identity transformation on their devotional life and literatures, especially the *ginan*s, a genre of devotional poetry that has been quintessential to Satpanthi and Khoja identity.

Locating Khoja Identity within Changing Contexts

The pre-colonial experience

During the course of its historical development, the Satpanth tradition evolved into several branches. As a result, Satpanthis were divided into various sub-groups such as the Khojas, Shamsis, Nijyapanthis (Nizarpanthis), Momnas, Imamshahis, Mahamargis and Barmatis (Maheswaris). Each sub-group adopted a distinctive identity centred on the particular *pir* or *sayyid* it followed as well as the occupation or profession of its members. The Khojas, the subject of this chapter, are said to be disciples of the

Branches of Satpanth

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15th-century Pir Sadr al-Din, the most prominent of the Satpanthi *pir*s. According to Azim Nanji, Pir Sadr al-Din appears to have played a key role in organizing and consolidating the Satpanth tradition. To him are attributed the greatest number of *ginan*s, the establishment of the first *jamaʿatkhana* (house of congregation) and the invention of the Khojki script (an alphabet for recording religious texts and keeping commercial accounts).[14] Khoja traditions assert that they belonged originally to trading castes of Sind and Gujarat, principally the Lohanas and Bhatias. Upon their joining Satpanth, Pir Sadr al-Din is said to have given his new disciples the title '*khwaja*' (a Persian term of which Khoja is a corruption) to replace the original Lohana '*thakkur*', both meaning 'lord' or 'master'.[15] The intent behind the new title was apparently to bestow a caste-like status on his followers, a concession to their social milieu in which caste was fundamental in defining status and societal relationships. Before the name of an individual the title '*khwaja*' served to indicate simultaneously occupational (merchant), social and religious identities.

Evidence from British gazetteers indicates that in early 19th-century Bombay the Khojas functioned socially as an endogamous caste. They had regular meetings to which adult males were summoned by a crier who went through the streets in Khoja neighbourhoods. At such gatherings, all kinds of disputes, including those related to marriages, were presented for arbitration. In case of violation of caste norms, members could vote on excommunication. There were also special caste dinners for which the group, as a corporate entity, owned its own cooking utensils.[16] In nomenclature and social customs they did not differ much from their Lohana and Bhatia brethren. *The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* remarks that in northeast Kathiawar, Khojas were still addressed by the Lohana title *thakkur* and wore their waistcoats in the Lohana fashion.[17] Like other mercantile communities in the region, they had their own writing system, Khojki, which was a refined form of Lohanaki, the script used by the Lohanas.[18] In personal law the group was, according to Hamid 'Ali, 'caught within the meshes of Hindu customary law'.[19] The remarriage of widows, as in the case of many Indian castes, was a strict taboo, while inheritance of property was limited only to males.[20]

In terms of religious life, as in some other regions, a multiplicity of beliefs that were at once complementary and contradictory had been integrated by the Khojas. One of the mainstays of their devotional life was the singing of *ginan*s, hymn-like poems which the *pir*s and *sayyid*s are said to have composed in various local languages to propagate the teachings of Satpanth in the manner in which they could be best understood by the

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local population. The term *ginan* is derived from the Sanskrit word for 'knowledge', in the sense of esoteric truth or wisdom; hence the *ginan*s may perhaps be best understood as hymns of esoteric wisdom.[21] In the *ginan*s, the *pir*s and *sayyid*s translated the core concepts of Satpanth, in particular that of the Imam, into one or more of the four religious discourses then prevalent in western India. The choice of discourse and the terms and idioms employed varied, depending on various factors such as the period of composition, doctrinal and thematic content, and the historical context of the audience. As a result, the formulation of Satpanthi doctrine in the *ginan*s was multilayered and multivalent in character.

Some of the earliest *ginan*s, such as the *Dasa Avatara*, often hailed as a Satpanth classic, created an ostensible equivalence between the Vaishnava Hindu concept of *avatara* and the Ismaili concept of *imam*. In such *ginan*s, the *pir*s represented themselves as guides who knew the whereabouts of the long-awaited tenth *avatara* of Vishnu, meaning the Ismaili Imam who they proclaimed was living in the west (Iran). As a result, these *ginan*s portray Satpanth as the completion or culmination of the Vaishnavite Hindu tradition.

Other *ginan*s formulated their teachings within a Sufi framework, reiterating a relationship between Sufism and Ismaili thought found in Iran, especially after the 13th century.[22] Several Sufi orders, particularly the Suhrawardiyya and the Qadiriyya, had a significant presence in the areas in which the *pir*s and *sayyid*s were most active, namely in Punjab and Sind. The use of Sufi terminology in the Satpanthi tradition served, therefore, to emphasize its close links with traditions of Islamic mysticism. The Ismaili Imams and their representatives, the *pir*s, were portrayed as spiritually enlightened teachers who could guide the spiritual development of each disciple (*murid*). With the aid of spiritual practices such as *dhikr* (remembrance of the divine names), the guide (*murshid*) prepared the disciple for experiencing the ultimate goal of Islamic mysticism – the 'face to face encounter with God', or *didar*, 'vision of the divine'. As keeper of the mysteries of *batin*, the esoteric, the Imam became not only the guide but often also the object of the spiritual quest, in which one encounters spiritually the light (*nur*) of the Imam, who is frequently referred to as 'Ali. In this context, 'Ali refers not merely to the historical person, but is symbolic of all the Imams and, indeed, the 'Light of the Imamate', a pre-eternal and cosmic light believed to be inherited by all Shi'i Imams following 'Ali.[23] A fine illustration of a *ginan* that adopts such a Sufi framework is the *Bujh Niranjan*, a lengthy composition in medieval Hindi describing the stages and states of spiritual development using Sufi technical terms

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drawn from the Persian and Arabic tradition.[24]

A third discourse found in the *ginan*s is that of the Sants, a group of lower-caste 'poet-saints' who were part of a powerful anti-ritual and anti-caste movement that swept across India at the same time as the Satpanthi tradition appeared. Formal organizations or *panth*s, similar to Sufi orders or fraternities, crystallized around some of the Sants. Each *panth* consisted of disciples who had dedicated themselves to following the teachings of a particular Sant and his descendants. Guru Nanak, commonly regarded today as the 'founder' of the Sikh religion, was one such Sant and the path he preached was initially called *Nanakpanth*. Indeed there are strong parallels between the evolution of *Nanakpanth* into the formal 'religion' that is known as Sikhism today, and the Satpanth tradition and its later evolution into various modern manifestations in Islam and Hinduism. The very name Satpanth was meant to resonate with the larger Sant tradition, the Imams and *pir*s being perceived as *satguru*s, 'true guides'. Adopting much of the idiom of Sant poetry, the *ginan*s challenge the efficacy of ritualism and rote learning as paths to salvation. Instead they urged the faithful to follow the right path (*satpanth*) by adopting a righteous lifestyle, recognizing the transitory nature of the world (*maya*) and the evils of attachment to it. Knowledge of true reality is only possible through regular constant remembrance (*sumiran*) of the divine name (*nam/shabd*) given to those who follow the true path by the *satguru*, the true guide ambiguously identified in most *ginan*s as either the *pir* or the *shah* (the Imam), or both. The *pir*s and *sayyid*s who composed the *ginan*s are depicted as teachers (*guru*s) who guided them to the path of spiritual enlightenment (*darshan/didar*) and thereby to eternal bliss.

The Bhakti tradition, a movement of devotionalism prevalent in north India, provided a fourth framework of expression. Bhakti vocabulary was used by the *pir*s for expressing one of the core concepts of Satpanth: the relationship of devotion between disciples and the Imam. Not only was the Imam a guide, a repository of knowledge and divine light, but also the object of love and veneration. Indeed for many of his followers love and devotion to the Imam are absolutely essential for the attainment of the spiritual vision and union for which the believer yearns. The most powerful representative of devotion in Bhakti poetry is the *virahini*, the woman longing for her beloved, best exemplified by Radha and the *gopi*s (dairy maids) in their longing for Krishna. In the *ginan*s, the *virahini* becomes symbolic of the human soul which experiences *viraha* (painful longing) for the beloved, almost always identified as the Imam. As a result, many *ginan*s portray the believer as a *virahini*, waiting expectantly for the return

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of the beloved from whom she has been separated. An interesting consequence of the prevalence of the *virahini* symbolism is that many *ginan*s are written in a feminine voice, although their authors are predominantly male.[25]

The various understandings of the doctrine of the Imam among the Khojas were echoed in their eclectic religious practices as documented in the early 19th century. In addition to performing Islamic rituals of mixed sectarian origins, they recited during their religious ceremonies the Satpanthi *ginan Dasa Avatara*, referred to earlier. In terms of their prayers, they performed the traditional Arabic *namaz* on the two *ʿid*s; otherwise, they had their own ritual prayer in the Gujarati language with a liberal sprinkling of Arabic and Persian phrases which they recited daily.[26] Their funeral ceremonies, as well as their marriages, were performed by Sunni officiants.[27] Yet the Khojas were clearly Shiʿi by virtue of their reverence for ʿAli, the first Shiʿi Imam. They venerated their Imams in Iran as his descendants, regularly sending tribute to them and, if possible, undertaking the arduous pilgrimage to see them in person.[28] They also participated in all the traditional Shiʿi rituals commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn during the month of Muharram. Those Khojas who could afford the expense would have the bodies of their dead shipped to Karbala in Iraq for burial near the shrine of Imam Husayn.[29] The significance of Karbala for the Khojas was further underscored by the fact that in a purification ritual called *ghat paat*, they sipped holy water in which small pills of Karbala clay were dissolved.[30]

Paval - How made?

Christopher Shackle and Zawahir Moir remark that the world view of Satpanth, although drawn from seemingly disparate sources, is remarkably coherent, representing ʿa creative achievement of the religious imagination perhaps more remarkable than that seemingly syncretic grafting of Hindu ideas on an Islamic base of a very individual type which has tended to attract disproportionate and sometimes dismissive comment in the analysis of outsiders'.[31] On the other hand, W. Ivanow characterized Satpanth as 'a transition between Ismailism, Sufism and Hinduism'.[32] On account of the uniquely constructed multivalent Satpanthi formulation, the Khojas could effectively participate in several social identities simultaneously and navigate between them with fluidity: they were members of a mercantile group who followed Satpanth, 'the true path', a tradition that could be simultaneously understood within both Islamic and Indic doctrinal frameworks. They owed allegiance to their *pir/imam/murshid*, a descendant of ʿAli residing in Iran. It was to him that they expressed devotion using the symbols and idioms taken from the love poetry associated

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with Krishna and the *gopi*s.

In many ways, pre-colonial Khojas represented a creative model of engagement with diversity that may be partially understood through Tony Stewart's 'translation theory' as a basis for understanding encounters between traditions. Following this hermeneutic model, we may regard the use of multiple discourses in the Satpanthi tradition as an attempt on the part of those who composed *ginan*s 'to be understood, to make themselves understood', in several different religious 'languages' depending on the context they were addressing.[33] Within the context of colonial India, as religious identities came to be essentialized and religious difference between Hindus and Muslims became a source of socio-cultural polarization, 'multilingual' doctrinal and social formulations such as those of Satpanth became difficult if not impossible to sustain.

The Khojas in colonial spaces

One of the features of modernity in South Asia is the ideological use of religion to categorize communities based on their adherence to a distinctive set of practices and doctrines. The British, who were to play a dominant role in South Asia from the mid-19th century onwards, 'understood organized religious life as constituted in the Church of England'.[34] As a result of their encounter with European conceptions of religions as distinct and, therefore, separate, many inhabitants of South Asia came to regard Islam and Hinduism as fixed monolithic entities, with their respective adherents separated from each other by well-defined boundaries. Traditions that seemed to combine elements of both, therefore, came to be seen as anomalous and even deviant. No doubt the widespread presence of 'Hindu-Muhammadan' groups of indeterminate religious identity was confusing to British officials who lamented the lack of 'pure Moslems' in India.[35] Naturally the Khojas, with the pluralistic character of their practices and 'multilingual' discourses through which they understood their faith, were difficult to categorize, creating many quandaries. For example, Hamid Ali comments that their legal position was such that it was 'as baffling to the [colonial] law courts as it (was) to the legislature'.[36] Were they Muslim or Hindu? If Muslim, then what kind of Islam did they practise? Not only was the exact nature of their religious identity questioned, but occasionally it also elicited rather caustic judgements. For example, a British colonial officer, Sir Bartle Frere, noted that the Khojas were considered heretical by many Muslims because they engaged in 'various remnants of idolatrous and mystical worship'.[37] Defining Khoja identity

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was, and continues to remain, problematic for academics as well. For instance, the late Aziz Ahmad, a scholar of South Asian Islam, grouped them along with other 'syncretic' sects of indeterminate identity, declaring that their chief interest was as 'curiosities of mushroom religious growth',[38] who added 'color to the bizarre pageantry of India'.[39] Ordinary Muslims and Hindus, he further remarked, considered such communities to be 'spiritual freaks'.[40] Clearly the unique blend of Khoja beliefs and customs was bewildering to outsiders. But by the mid-19th century, it was becoming perplexing internally as well. In 1847 Hubib Ebrahim, a Khoja witness in an inheritance case, declared to a British judge: 'Some say we are Soonees [Sunnis], some Sheas [Shi'a]. Our religion is a separate religion, Aga Khan is esteemed as a great man amongst us.'[41]

In the latter half of the 19th century and early 20th century, two sets of factors triggered a series of changes which led to the Khojas redefining themselves to better fit new and more narrowly defined categories of identity. The first set of factors was external to the community and related to the establishment of British colonial rule in India. The very 'idiom' of this rule, as Peter Hardy terms it, was communalist, systematically institutionalizing India into a nation of discrete communities defined along religious lines through various bureaucratic practices.[42] Census and ethnographic surveys highlighted religious rather than other markers of identity, forcing people to identify themselves primarily in religious terms. Through such colonial instruments, the peoples of the subcontinent began to perceive themselves as a series of distinct religious communities. Consequently many traditionally antagonistic sectarian groups and separately organized collectives were represented in the single category of either Hindu or Muslim.[43] Muslim elites, for example, started to view all the Muslims in India, notwithstanding their significant ethnic, linguistic, social and sectarian differences, as a single monolithic community united by their religion. Eventually, in an atmosphere infused with nationalist ideas and sentiment, some Muslim and Hindu leaders began to see religious communities as distinct nations. It is this conception that led to demands for the partition of the subcontinent on the basis of the two-nation theory.

British rule also brought with it Western culture and new institutions, particularly schools and colleges, many run by Christian missionaries dedicated to promoting Western models of education and European lifestyles. This development prompted a general concern among many Muslims because it was perceived as a potential threat to Muslim identity. In response, revivalist and reformist movements calling for fresh interpretations of Islam emerged, offering a spectrum of definitions

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concerning the maintenance of Islamic identity in the colonial context.[44] Many of these definitions, ranging from liberal to ultra-conservative, sought to differentiate sharply Muslim from non-Muslim using as guides the Qur'an, the *sunna* (practices) of the Prophet Muhammad and the traditions of the first generation of Muslims. None of them had space for the multivalent identity projected by communities like the Khojas. Such groups were perceived as 'syncretic', and they would have to align their concept of Islam in conformity with the majority community. The exercise of their faith would have to conform to externally defined notions of orthopraxy.[45] Practices and ideas, particularly those inherited from local Indian traditions, came to be regarded as innovations and, therefore, 'non-Islamic'. Consequently the late 19th and 20th centuries witnessed individuals, groups and entire villages being targeted for reform by grassroots Muslim reformers, such as the Faraizis, who sought to eliminate a whole range of practices, customs and ideas among Muslims that they considered 'Hindu' or 'un-Islamic'.[46] Conversely Hindu reformists, particularly groups such as the Arya Samaj, produced aggressive propaganda that was aimed at 're-Hinduizing' groups they considered to be Hindu in origin. Among the targets for 'Hinduization' were Satpanthi groups. In 1913–1914 the Arya Samaj embarked on a vigorous campaign to encourage the Guptis, a group who were outwardly Hindu but inwardly Satpanthi, to undergo the *shuddhi* 'purification' ceremony so that they could become proper Hindus.[47]As a result of such campaigns, some Satpanthi groups such as the Nijyapanthis and the Imamshahis, as Dominique-Sila Khan has shown, eventually came to identify themselves as Hindus.[48]

Suspicion of local indigenous cultures thought to be 'un-Islamic' or 'Hindu' and the privileged status accorded 'Arabo-Persian' elements as 'Islamic' radically changed perceptions of cultural elements such as language, literature, dress, music and dance. As these began to be viewed through the politicized lens of religious ideology, they were subject to either 'Islamization' or 'Sanskritization', which ultimately resulted in cultural polarization between Hindu and Muslim communities. As yet more elements of culture came to be perceived as 'Hindu' or 'Muslim', the area of common cultural ground between Muslims and Hindus in certain parts of India shrank.[49] In this way communities became demarcated on the basis of rigidly defined cultural boundaries. For instance, just as the Hindu nationalists felt it was no longer possible for Hindu poets to write in Urdu, which they perceived as an Islamic language, Muslim nationalists felt it inappropriate for Muslim poets to write in Hindi, regarded as a Hindu language. The sociologist Imtiaz Ahmed correctly observes that

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the ultimate result of such processes was a disjunction that had a profound significance in shaping interaction between Muslims and Hindus by sharpening cultural differences between them.[50]

In this tense milieu, groups such as the Khojas, who had articulated their identity using concepts and formulations that were uncommon by the standards of the Arabo-Persian perceptions of Islam, were forced to clarify their position vis-à-vis the general Muslim community. This, then, marks the beginning of a period of sustained dialogue and engagement of the Khojas with other Muslim groups in South Asia.

A second set of factors that was responsible for the reorientation of Khoja identity related to developments internal to the Khojas. Specifically these were consequences of the move in 1841 of Hasan ʿAli Shah Aga Khan I, the 46th Nizari Ismaili Imam, to India. Following political disturbances in Iran, the seat of the Nizari Imamate for several centuries, Aga Khan I came first to Sind where he allied himself with the British. After a short stay in Calcutta in 1848, he settled in Bombay, which at the time had the largest settlement of Khojas. The Khojas had a tradition of sending tributes to the Aga Khan's ancestors in Iran through specially designated emissaries. Some had even undertaken the arduous overland journey to Iran to pay their personal respects to their *pir/murshid*. Notwithstanding this spiritual allegiance, when it came to conducting their internal affairs, the Khojas, like contemporary Ismailis in other regions, had been rather autonomous. For instance, the managing of caste property in Bombay, including the *jamaʿatkhanas*, was the responsibility of a select group of Khoja commercial magnates who formed a kind of council of elders (*justi*). In addition to the *justi*, the *mukhi* (chief) and *kamadia* (treasurer), as well as a *sayyid/vakil*, were central figures of authority in the caste.[51] Their duties included the collection of religious dues from caste members for transmission to the Imams in Iran. Already in the early 19th century, some of the more progressive-minded magnates had been instrumental in instituting what were then perceived as modernizing reforms among the Khojas, such as the introduction of English in their schools.[52]

Soon after his arrival, Aga Khan I began asserting his own authority over all matters related to the Khojas. For instance, he began instituting changes to some of their practices and customs, insisting on stronger participation in Shiʿi rituals. In 1847, in keeping with traditional Shiʿa religious law, he championed a change supporting a daughter's right to inherit a share in her father's property rather than the traditional Khoja practice which did not allow daughters to inherit.[53] He also began to assert control over communally owned Khoja property, a move which upset the upper

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echelons of the Khoja hierarchy. Resenting his authority, some members of the Khoja elite challenged his control as well as his right to receive tribute from them.[54]

The British colonial courts became the arena where the disputes between the Aga Khan and his opponents were fought. When it was not possible for the community to settle matters internally, the aggrieved parties filed legal suits. A common strategy in these cases was for the plaintiffs to challenge the Aga Khan's authority over the Khojas by questioning their religious identity. Thus the dissenters claimed that the Khojas were originally Sunni and accused the Aga Khan of propagating 'heretical' ideas to bolster his authority. In response the Aga Khan asked those faithful to him to sign a document in which they pledged to desist from Sunni rites and to follow the customs of their Shi'i faith openly. He further instructed them that they no longer had to observe *taqiyya* (precautionary dissimulation of beliefs), as under British rule the exercise of all religions was free. The majority of the Khojas signed the document.[55]

Several years of further dispute between the followers of the Aga Khan and his opponents culminated in the Aga Khan Case of 1866 in which the Bombay High Court undertook the daunting task of defining Khoja identity. In a lengthy landmark judgement, the presiding judge, Justice Arnould, gave validation to the Aga Khan's authority over the Khojas: 'a sect of people whose ancestors were Hindu in origin, which was converted to and has throughout abided in the faith of the Shia Imami Ismailis, which has always been and still is bound by ties of spiritual allegiance to the hereditary Imam of the Ismailis.'[56] Unable to accept this judgement, the Aga Khan's opponents joined the Sunni fold, calling themselves Sunni Khojas.

In the late 19th century and early 20th centuries, a period when Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III (d. 1957), was the Ismaili Imam, the community's sectarian boundaries were further narrowed as a result of another court case. This time the dissenters, who included Haji Bibi, a cousin of the Aga Khan, and other members of his extended family, claimed that the Aga Khan was, like themselves, Ithna'ashari (Twelver Shi'i) by faith. His authority over the Ismailis was that of a traditional Sufi *pir*, not a Shi'i Imam, and, as such, they too were entitled to a share of the revenue he received from the Ismailis. In 1908 a British judge presiding over the Haji Bibi case (as it came to be known) gave further legal validation to the Aga Khan's authority and reaffirmed the Ismaili identity of the Khojas.[57] Once again a group of dissenters seceded, this time forming the Khoja Ithna'ashari community. As a result of these schisms and

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legal decisions, the identity of those Khojas who remained loyal to the Aga Khan was being clearly differentiated from that of the Sunnis and the Ithnaʿasharis alike, the cornerstone of which was allegiance to a living Ismaili Imam.[58]

The British courts in India played a crucial role in legally defining and upholding the identity of the Khojas as a community of Muslims. Key to this articulation was the 1866 judgement of Justice Arnould. He carefully sifted through the evidence he had gathered from witnesses, looking for elements that he could fit within the framework of the categories 'Islam', 'Muslim', 'Hindu', 'Sunni', 'Shiʿa' and 'Ismaili' deduced from the scholarship of Western historians of Islam. He regarded these experts as authorities who had objective knowledge of the subject and were, he felt, more reliable than the Khoja practitioners themselves.[59]

As a result of these legal categorizations and the pressure to conform from the courts, the Khojas like other Muslim groups found themselves being defined with reference to the sectarian categories of 'Shiʿa' and 'Sunni' as understood generally in the wider context of the Indian subcontinent. In this way they began to see themselves increasingly in sectarian terms, that is, as Ismaili, Ithnaʿashari or Sunni. Sectarian affiliation became a primary marker of identity, superseding other markers such as caste, ethnicity, etc., a trend echoed in many other communities in colonial India. During the course of the 20th century the Khojas who remained loyal to the Aga Khans began identifying themselves specifically as (Nizari) Ismailis. While the British courts may have contributed to defining the Ismaili identity of the Khojas legally, the issue had yet to be resolved in terms of their doctrines and practices. For this process, as we shall see below, the Khojas had to rely on the various reform initiatives instituted by the Aga Khans.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith has remarked that Muslim societies generally place a greater emphasis on orthopraxy (conformity to ritual practice) than orthodoxy (conformity to doctrine) as the yardstick to determine 'correct' Islamic practice.[60] In many Muslim societies, the degree of conformity to traditional ritual practice has become the index by which the 'Islamic' character of groups like the Khojas is now judged.[61] The multivalent nature of Khoja practices as well as the prevalence of 'Indian' or 'Hindu' elements in their literature figured prominently in the testimony presented during the various court cases brought against the Aga Khans. British judges made references to these practices and observances in endeavouring to understand the religious identity and origins of the Khojas. Those practices and beliefs which did not make sense within the

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Western construction of categories such as 'Islam', 'Sunni' and 'Shiʿa' were classified as irrelevant, ignorant, superstitious or simply false.[62]

Ismaili Khojas in post-colonial spaces

Such questions became particularly pressing in the aftermath of the partition of British India in 1947 and the creation of Pakistan. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the popularly acclaimed founder of Pakistan, was by birth a Khoja and was educated as a lawyer in England. In pressing for a separate nation for the subcontinent's Muslims, he had in mind a polity that would provide Muslims with a safe haven in which to practise their religion and nurture their cultural traditions. More specifically he envisaged a Western-style liberal democracy in which the Muslim majority and non-Muslim minorities would be free to practise their religions without interference from the state. Soon after its founding, however, there were attempts to transform Pakistan into an 'Islamic' state rather than simply a Muslim homeland. The push towards a more 'Islamic' character came from Sunni religious scholars (*'ulama'*) who had initially opposed Jinnah's vision of Pakistan and, indeed, had termed him the 'great infidel'. Along with Mawlana Mawdudi (d. 1947), the founder of the Jamaʿat-i Islami, they now felt that Islam, rather than any Western secular ideology, should underpin the newly founded state of Pakistan. In their view, this would ensure that Islamic ideals of economic and social justice would prevail in society. Eventually, to counter powerful forces of ethno-nationalism that threatened its integrity, the Pakistani state itself began to appeal to Islam as a binding ideological force which could hold together a nation composed of different ethnic groups.

Jinnah =

Some regimes, notably that of Zia ul-Haqq (1978–1988), introduced 'Islamization' policies with a view to enforcing upon Pakistan's Muslim citizens religious and cultural practices that were deemed to be 'Islamically' correct. Such programmes proved to be inimical to the fabric of Pakistani society since they accentuated religious and sectarian differences. The identification of Islam as the state religion negatively influenced the status of non-Muslims, particularly Christians and Hindus, who were effectively rendered second-class citizens, at least as far as the right-wing religious political parties were concerned. Furthermore, by granting a privileged status to the Sunni interpretation of Islam (specifically to that of the Jamaʿat-i Islami) the state, in effect, marginalized alternative interpretations of the faith. Policies of Islamization thus resulted in heightened sectarian tension, not only between Shiʿi and Sunni but even among

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Sunni communities. This provoked heated debate on the determination of 'correct' Muslim identity. Groups such as the Ahmadiyya, who claim to be Muslim, were proclaimed non-Muslim by the state and subjected to religious persecution.[63] In this atmosphere of growing intolerance, the identity of the Ismailis also came under increased scrutiny and their position grew precarious. On the one hand, the significant involvement of the institutions of the Aga Khan Development Network in the following decades in improving the socio-economic, educational and health standards of both the Ismaili and non-Ismaili population in Pakistan has helped in fostering a great deal of goodwill towards the Ismailis in many different circles of Pakistani society. On the other hand, some right-wing Sunni groups such as the Jamaʿat-i Islami, Tablighi Jamaʿat and other Wahhabi-Salafi-influenced groups have launched vigorous campaigns to propagate their version of Islam among the Ismailis and other Muslim groups. In Karachi, a city with a large Ismaili population, such groups have built Sunni *masjid*s adjacent to Ismaili *jamaʿatkhana*s in an attempt to entice Ismailis to join the Sunni fold.

In post-colonial India, the Ismaili Khojas have not been questioned as intensely by other Muslims on the subject of their Islamic identity as in Pakistan. This is perhaps due to the general situation of Muslims in India as vulnerable minority groups who have collectively suffered considerable discrimination, notwithstanding the avowedly secular and pluralistic ideals on which the Indian nation was founded. Many Hindus have come to regard Ismaili Khojas as model Muslims since they appear to have better assimilated to Indian culture in contrast to those Muslims who articulate their identity using non-Indic, Arabo-Persian symbolism. Yet identification even as assimilated Muslims in contemporary India is not without its problems. Occasionally during communal riots the Ismailis, too, have suffered the fate of other Muslim communities, falling victim to attacks by right-wing Hindu mobs. For instance, during the riots in Bombay in the aftermath of the destruction of Babri Mosque in December 1992, the Muslim victims numbered many Ismailis. The genocide of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, in which both the Hindu nationalist-dominated state government and police were deemed to be complicit, also had an impact on the state's Ismaili population, a small proportion of whom chose to emigrate from Gujarat.

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The Re-articulation of Khoja Identity

The history of the Ismaili Khojas in the 20th century is best characterized as a series of responses to the ever changing political, social and cultural landscapes of colonial and post-colonial South Asia, which we have discussed above. Within this highly volatile milieu, Khoja understandings of themselves and their faith changed significantly. The plurality of frameworks which they had traditionally used to express their multivalent identity became increasingly difficult to sustain in the face of modernity and the polarizing forces of religious nationalism and communalism. Among those Khojas who defined themselves as Ismaili, the process of identity redefinition constituted part of a larger programme of social and religious reforms, initiated by Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, in the early 20th century. The impetus underpinning the Aga Khan's reforms stemmed from the need to respond to the growing impact of modernization, socio-economic transformation and nationalism on his followers, as well as the need to clearly define their identity as Shi'i Ismailis within the larger Muslim *umma* (community). To facilitate his policies, Aga Khan III established several new institutions that were better suited to governing and responding to the needs of his followers within the dynamic socio-political milieu of colonial India. In tandem with these efforts, there was a progressive re-articulation of the Ismaili Khoja interpretation and practice of their faith within a framework of Islamic and specifically Shi'i traditions. Following his death in 1957, Aga Khan III's programme of reforms was considerably intensified and accelerated by his grandson, Prince Karim, Aga Khan IV, and extended to other Ismaili communities across the world.

Reorienting understanding and practice of faith

To execute their ambitious programme of reforms, the Aga Khans used two important instruments: constitutions and *farman*s (directives). In 1905 Aga Khan III introduced the first of a series of constitutions in which the Ismailis were formally and legally defined in modern terms as a 'religious community' of which he was the head. This marked the initiation of a period during which he created new structures of national and provincial councils through which he implemented change in a variety of areas including governance, social welfare, health and education. As they evolved in the post-colonial era, these institutions became the primary agencies for implementing social and economic change among

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the Ismailis in India, Pakistan and the newly independent countries of East Africa. In the later decades of the 20th century, under the leadership of Aga Khan IV, they evolved into an international network that 'both expresses and expedites the modernization of the community while it also emphasizes and reinforces the singular role of the Imam'.[64] In addition to outlining the roles, responsibilities and regulations governing these institutions, the constitutions contained lengthy sections governing social customs, as well as personal and family law with detailed regulations on marriage and divorce. Over the course of the 20th century, these constitutions were revised several times to keep pace with the changes in contexts and circumstances (as discussed elsewhere in this volume).

The Aga Khans also issued *farman*s through which they conveyed to their followers counsel and direction on a wide range of issues, both religious and secular. In the eyes of their followers, the *farman*s embodied the ongoing and infallible guidance of the Imams; hence obedience to them was obligatory. Not surprisingly *farman*s became the most significant means through which the Aga Khans mandated reform in all aspects of the Ismaili community.[65] In the early 20th century, with the rapid spread of print culture in South Asia, *farman*s were compiled and published in books so that they could be widely accessible to Ismaili Khojas. In most of these early publications, the *farman*s were recorded in Indic vernaculars – Hindustani, Gujarati and Sindhi – while in later years English became more prominent, though translations into local languages were also made available. As the corpus of printed *farman*s grew, it developed into a bona fide genre of Ismaili religious literature, representing the word of the Imams. Readings of selected *farman*s became an important feature of Ismaili worship, indicative of their status as the principal source for contemporary normative understanding of the faith.

The programme of reforms instituted by the Aga Khans dramatically transformed Ismaili Khoja social, economic and religious life. In the area of religious life and practice, it appears to have had two intersecting objectives: first, to promote among the Khojas a better understanding of Ismaili concepts and practices using frameworks consistent with Shi'i and general Islamic traditions; and second, to articulate an interpretation of Islam that was relevant to the emerging contexts of colonial and post-colonial South Asia in a changing world.[66] The expression and application of these objectives among the Khojas was by their very nature a complex process involving changes in many dimensions of life. At the fundamental level it involved shifting the understanding of key doctrines away from local frameworks (increasingly viewed as Hinduistic) to ones that would be

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considered authentically Islamic. This meant that the Ismaili doctrine of the Imamate, instead of being understood within a frame of reference that was in parts ahistorical or mythological and intermingled with idioms from the Vaishnavite, Sant or Bhakti traditions, was now formulated within a broader framework of Islamic history, theology and mysticism, as well as Shi'i paradigms of religious authority.

A key component of religious reform under Aga Khan III was familiarizing the Ismaili Khojas with new ways of enabling the continuum of understanding of the faith, including the production of *farman*s, books, periodicals and pamphlets, in several vernacular languages, particularly Gujarati. It also involved the establishment of a network of schools to impart religious education to children with a curriculum that would reflect the new frameworks of understanding. Founded as early as 1903, these schools were initially called 'Sindhi' because the students were taught Khojki or Khwajah Sindhi, the special script of the Khojas in which religious material was recorded.[67] Interestingly the formulation of an explicitly Ismaili Muslim identity also resulted in changes in nomenclature. Traditionally Khoja names had been indistinguishable from those of their Lohana and Bhatia compatriots. Since these names were increasingly considered to be indicative of a 'Hindu' identity in the socio-political climate of 20th-century South Asia, they were gradually replaced by Arabic or Persian ones that resonated better with Muslim identity. As a result, while many Ismaili Khojas retained ancestral names now considered to be 'Hindu' (such as Nanji, Ramji, Dewji, etc.), Arabo-Persian names became increasingly common for generations born from the early 20th century onwards, as in the case of some other Muslim groups in India. In some instances, especially for families who experienced great societal pressure to conform to Islamic norms, even ancestral names were changed.[68]

After the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and the rise of movements seeking to define Pakistan as an 'Islamic state', the trend towards 'Islamization' gained further momentum.[69] There was a rapid removal or reformulation of rituals, including those connected with birth, marriage and death, to render them more Islamic in character. The most important of the changes, however, was in regard to the daily prayer that the Ismaili Khojas recited three times daily. Khoja tradition attributed the composition of this prayer, simply called *du'a*, to their founding *pir*, Sadr al-Din. The prayer was by and large in the Indic vernaculars, Sindhi and Gujarati, with a number of phrases in Arabic. Among its contents were invocations for the intercession of the Imam who was depicted both as *pir* and *murshid*, the 'immaculate one'. In the 1950s this *du'a*, which had been

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modified several times during its history, was replaced by one entirely in Arabic.

The new *duʿa* consists of six parts, each of which begins with one or more Qur'anic verses,[70] some of which are used as proof texts for the doctrine of the Imamate. Each part also contains intercessory prayers addressed to the Imams and concludes in a prostration (*sujud*) affirming obedience and submission to God (*Allah*). The introduction of the new prayer was significant for two reasons: first, the use of Arabic instead of an Indic vernacular aligned the prayer with a universal language of Islamic liturgical practice; secondly, it reflected a shift in the Khoja understanding of the doctrine of the Imamate from a Vaisnavite-coloured framework to one based on Qur'anic proof texts. The fact that the new prayer was to be universally recited by Nizari Ismailis the world over and was not unique to the Khojas indicates a psychological shift in orientation not only from 'Khoja' to 'Ismaili' but also from local to universal. It indicates that the contemporary Khoja practice was not merely in response to changing conditions in South Asia but, more importantly, an occasion to create a pan-Ismaili identity by developing a set of ritual practices that would be common to Ismailis wherever they lived and whatever their local cultural practices. This is a point we shall discuss in the conclusion.

Impact on devotional life and literature

How did this reorientation of various Khoja customs and practices bear upon their devotional life and literature? As noted earlier, the principal devotional literature of the Satpanth tradition were the *ginan*s believed to have been composed by a series of *pir*s and *sayyid*s who for centuries served as intermediaries between the Ismaili Imams in Iran and their Khoja followers in India.[71] Composed in several Indic languages and sung in various *raga*s, the *ginan*s had been the focus of intense veneration as the embodiment of truth and wisdom. The recitation of *ginan*s, alongside performance of ritual prayers, was part of the tradition of Satpanthi worship. Memorization of *ginan* texts formed an important element in the transmission of Satpanthi teachings from one generation to the next. Beyond their role in worship, the *ginan*s permeated many aspects of communal and individual life.[72] Notwithstanding their special significance for the Khojas, the *ginan*s were by no means the only genre of devotional literature in Khoja religious life. The 18th- and 19th-century manuscripts belonging to Khoja communities reveal that, in addition to the *ginan*s, devotional literature from a variety of non-Satpanthi tradi-

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tions also played a significant role in Khoja religious life. For example, we find in these manuscripts, juxtaposed to the *ginan*s, a diverse collection of texts: poems attributed to famous Sufi, Sant and Bhakti poets; *marsiya*, the traditional Shi'i elegies commemorating the martyrdom of the Shi'i Imam Husayn in Sindhi, Hindustani or Gujarati; religious narratives to be read during Muharram assemblies traditionally held by Shi'i communities; poems of devotion to the Prophet Muhammad and his family; *fal-nama*, or prognostication charts, attributed either to a Shi'i Imam or a *pir*, as well as various amulets, magical squares and formulae to be used for talismanic purposes.[73] The presence of such a broad spectrum of devotional literatures among pre-colonial Khoja communities is hardly surprising given the multivalent nature of their religious practice. Furthermore Michel Boivin suggests that by including such material in their manuscripts, the Khojas were adhering to the standard episteme for *pothi*s, prayer books, widely prevalent among different religious communities in Sind.[74]

With the reorientation of Khoja religious identity in the early part of the 20th century, much of such non-*ginan*ic literature found in the manuscript tradition fell into oblivion; it had effectively lost its significance and relevance in the then emerging formulations of faith. The *ginan*s, on the other hand, because they were quintessential to Khoja identity, continued to retain their importance, albeit in new ways. As a result, their character, content and function changed significantly so that they could be accommodated within the new orientations of the Ismaili Khoja community. Most noteworthy in this regard was the creation of an official canon of authorized texts of *ginan*s. The process of collecting and collating the texts was by no means an easy task since manuscripts were scattered far and wide, and there seems to have been no attempt to create a consolidated record. This is perhaps an indication that for pre-colonial Khojas, the *ginan*s may not have been initially conceived of as a scriptural corpus exclusively identified with one religious community, as they came to be regarded later with the emergence of the printed canon. In fact, as a result of the different orientation in which their identities developed in the 20th century, other Satpanthi groups such as the Imamshahis, with whom the Ismaili Khojas have historically shared the *ginan*s, have also come to consider them as part of their 'Hindu' heritage.[75] These contradictory characterizations of the *ginan*s are another indication that they represent a genre that is portable, surmounting modern constructions of religious boundaries. The explanation is also significant since it is underpinned by a perspective that is now almost universally associated with the *ginan*s,

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namely, that they were intended primarily as a literature of conversion, composed to call Hindus to the Ismaili interpretation of Islam. As Amrita Shodhan points out, this is a perspective that was first publicly articulated in the Aga Khan Case of 1866 and became definitive in the subsequent characterization of *ginan*ic literature.[76] Recent scholarship has raised a host of questions regarding the term 'conversion': its implication for our understanding of the processes involved in religious change; its use as a political tool by the colonial and post-colonial state; its inadequacy when explaining the spread of Islamic ideas across the subcontinent; as well as the role that literary genres such as the *ginan*s or Sufi folk poetry may have played in the process.[77]

Community traditions assert that Aga Khans II and III, in an attempt to produce a 'standardized' corpus of *ginan*s, entrusted the responsibility for collecting manuscripts to Lalji Devraj and his associates. On the basis of manuscripts they had collected, Lalji Devraj and his team recorded approximately 700 texts which they edited in varying degrees.[78] They eventually published them through the Khoja Press in Bombay. Founded in 1903 by Lalji Devraj, the press, later known as the Ismaili Printing Press (reflecting the shift in identity from Khoja to Ismaili) became the official publishing house for Ismaili Khoja literature. It used fonts specially manufactured in Germany for printing Khojki. In 1922 the publication of *ginan*s was transferred to the Recreation Club Institute, founded by Aga Khan III in 1919, to oversee publication of religious material as well as to engage in research on Ismailism. To prevent the circulation of non-official versions of *ginan* texts, private publication was discouraged; the Ghulam-i Husayn Chapkhanu, a private press which used to print lithographs of *ginan*s stopped doing so in the early 20th century. Since Lalji Devraj's publication activities were believed to have had the imprimatur of the Aga Khans, many Ismaili Khojas considered his editions to be bona fide and authoritative texts of *ginan*ic literature. His *Tapsil buk*, a catalogue of some 700 *ginan*s published in 1915, has been regarded as the official list of the early printed *ginan* texts.[79] In the 1970s, when further revisions in the texts of the *ginan*s were under consideration, the Lalji Devraj editions were used as the basis of the new revised versions.[80] The emergence of the Lalji Devraj editions as the authoritative canon was greatly facilitated by the fact that his team is said to have buried nearly 3,500 manuscripts which they had used as the bases for their editions.[81] This move limited the possibility for the emergence of competing versions of the *ginan* texts. More significant, however, is the fact that the Lalji Devraj editions excluded perhaps as many as 300 *ginan* texts from the 'official' corpus,

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since their contents were deemed to be inappropriate for the direction in which the Ismaili Khoja identity was evolving.

The creation of a 'standardized' corpus of *ginan*s is significant because it also effectively amounted to a closing of a centuries-old tradition of *ginan* compositions, the last official exponent of this genre being a woman, Sayyida Imam Begum, who died in Karachi in 1866.[82] It also terminated the era of *pir*s and *sayyid*s, and by so doing contributed to further consolidate the spiritual authority of the Aga Khans among the Khojas. Although their Ismaili Khoja followers continued to recite the *ginan*s, their importance as sources of normative understanding of Khoja faith and practice gradually diminished. This all important function came to be increasingly performed by the *farman*s issued periodically by the Aga Khans. Since the *farman*s embodied the authoritative contemporary, ongoing guidance of the living Imams, they soon eclipsed the *ginan*s. As the tradition of *farman*s was consolidated and became readily available in print, its significance grew over the course of the 20th century. This development was to have significant impact on the contextual and relational functions of the *ginan*s, altering the ways in which the communities of believers interpreted and related to them. For example, *ginan*s came to be increasingly seen as commentaries on the inner meanings of the Qur'an. There was a notable shift in the type of *ginan*s that were recited. Those *ginan*s that were considered explicitly 'Hinduistic' in their mode of theological expression were abandoned or no longer recited. A noteworthy example of this is the *Das Avatara*, mentioned earlier. One of the classic *ginan*s of Satpanth literature, its recitation had completely ceased by the mid-1950s and in subsequent decades it disappeared from the general consciousness of the community. In the late 1970s, other compositions that explained Ismaili doctrine predominantly within an Indic framework were also dropped from active use. Similarly individual terms in *ginan*s that could also be interpreted as Hinduistic were changed and replaced by those seen to have a greater Islamic resonance. In effect this meant that words of Indic origin were replaced with Arabo-Persian ones. For example, 'Hari' was replaced by 'Ali', '*swami*' by '*maula*', 'Gur Brahma' by 'Nabi Muhammad', and so on.[83] However, the definition of what constituted a Hindu element as opposed to an Islamic one became a major issue of contention with certain members of the community, who argued that terms from Indic languages with no specific theological connection to the Hindu tradition should be replaced by Arabo-Persian ones.[84] By the end of the 20th century, when the Ismaili Khojas came into greater contact with Ismaili communities in other parts of the world, many with distinctive cultural

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traditions of their own, the perspective in which they understood *ginans* changed even further. The Ismaili Khojas, who had hitherto conflated the Ismaili tradition almost exclusively with the *ginans*, came to realize that they were only one part of the global literary traditions of Ismaili devotional literatures that included genres in Arabic and Persian such as the *qasida*, *maddoh* and *manqabat*.

Towards a new historiography

The abandonment of traditional Satpanthi frameworks created the need for a new literature through which the Ismaili Khojas could develop broader and more universal understandings of Ismaili doctrine. To meet this need, the Recreation Club, which Aga Khan III established in 1919 to engage in research and publication on Ismaili history, commissioned the first comprehensive history of the Ismaili Imamate in Gujarati, the most widely spoken language among the Khojas. The task of writing this monumental history, documenting the reigns of 48 Ismaili Imams from the 7th to the 20th centuries, was assigned to ʿAli Muhammad Jan Muhammad Chunara (1881–1966), who had served for a short period of time as the social secretary to Aga Khan III. In addition to being a factory owner in Bombay, Chunara was a pioneering journalist and editor of *The Ismaili*, the Anglo-Gujarati weekly for the Ismaili Khoja community published in Bombay. Already in 1918, at the behest of the Ismaili Sahitya Utjek Mandal (the Ismaili Literary Society), he had written a brief history of the Fatimids in Gujarati. With the assistance of Husein Shariff Bharmal, Hasan Ali Rahim Nathani and others on the staff of the *The Ismaili* who were knowledgeable in various languages including Arabic, Persian, Urdu and English, Chunara spent eight years researching the sources.[85] Finally in 1936, the year commemorating Aga Khan III's Golden Jubilee, or 50 years as Imam, he published a 180-page work. Significantly his Gujarati history of the Ismaili Imamate had an Arabic title, *Nuram [Nuran] Mubin*, 'Manifest Light', a Qur'anic expression (4:174) that is interpreted by Ismailis as a reference to the 'Light of the Imamate' manifest in the world as a divinely ordained means of guidance for humanity. The work's Gujarati subtitle, *Allahni Pavitra Rasi*, 'God's Sacred Rope', echoes another Qur'anic phrase, *habli'llah*, 'God's Rope' (3:103), which is commonly interpreted in Shiʿi sources as a reference to the institution of the Imamate. The use of these two phrases in the title thus underscores the increasingly Qur'anic bases for newly emerging Ismaili Khoja understandings of the Imamate.

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In his preface ʻAli Muhammad Chunara commented that among his motivations for writing this book was the widespread ignorance among Khojas about their faith, as a result of which they fell prey to misinformation and propaganda spread by unscrupulous individuals who were intent on luring them away from the Ismaili community. He expressed the hope that, armed with the knowledge acquired from the *Nuram Mubin*, Ismaili Khojas would be able 'to stand on both feet'.[86] These remarks clarify a broader objective for the publication of his book; it was a means through which Ismaili Khojas could acquire sufficient knowledge with which to articulate and defend their faith. In this regard, the *Nuram Mubin* constituted a significant work within a larger corpus of literature written in Sindhi, Gujarati and Urdu, which was used as a response to a barrage of polemical attacks from groups opposed to the Aga Khan and the Ismailis. This anti-Ismaili polemic, particularly powerful in the first half of the 20th century, was intended to convert Ismaili Khojas to either Sunni or Ithnaʻashari Islam, or to Hinduism. In this battle for the hearts and minds of the Khojas, Chunara was a leading member of a group of articulate Ismaili loyalists with considerable literary skills. Through a range of Gujarati publications that included newspaper articles, pamphlets and small booklets responding to Ithnaʻashari Shiʻi and Arya Samaj attacks, textbooks on Ismaili history and religion, and even volumes of poetry, this group of Ismaili revivalists, as Zawahir Moir calls them, 'sought to create a renewed sense of Ismaili identity, strong enough to hearten and educate their supporters and refute their opponents'.[87] Many of these publications cited generously from the Qur'an and the *hadith*s, sayings of and about the Prophet, reflecting the Islamically based nature of their arguments. Similar works defending the Aga Khan and Ismaili doctrines were also written by prominent Ismaili Khojas in Sindhi during the same period. Some of these treatises attempt to show Ismailism, in particular the *ginan*s, as expressions of the powerful currents of Sufism that form the bedrock of Sindhi culture.[88]

Since Aga Khan III recommended that his followers read the *Nuram Mubin* in order to learn the history of the Imams, the work was regarded as authoritative and sold briskly, necessitating several reprints. It was also translated into Urdu.[89] In the last decades of the 20th century, further publication of the *Nuram Mubin* ceased and the book was withdrawn from circulation. Although there were no official explanations for this development, we can speculate that there may have been two principal reasons. First, as discussed above, the book was initially written in the early decades of the 20th century in a context of virulent polemical attacks

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on the Ismaili faith and the legitimacy of the Aga Khans. As such the work, written in part to counter these attacks, adopted a perspective that was becoming rapidly outdated in the new circumstances in which Ismaili Khojas were living. Second, the book was highly hagiographical in nature, replete with miracles associated with the Imams and *pir*s. Some of these accounts were drawn directly from allegories in the *ginan*s which had been interpreted rather literally. As these accounts attracted criticism about their factuality, a more historical perspective was adopted, reflected in newer histories such as Sherali Alidina's *Ta'rikh imamat* (1952), a history of the Imamate in the Sindhi language, and the *Ta'rikh a'imma Isma'iliyya* (1978–1983), a four-volume work in Urdu. Both works avoid mythological and hagiographical discourses in their presentation of history and were published by the Ismaili Association for Pakistan, the official community institution authorized by the Imam to publish such material. In the 1990s these locally produced histories were superseded by works of modern historical scholarship published under the auspices of The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London – a reflection of the transnational direction in which Aga Khan IV was guiding Ismaili communities.

Conclusion: Transnationalizing Ismaili Khoja Identity[90]

This chapter has explored the experiences of the Ismaili Khojas as they rearticulated their identity in response to changes in the cultural and political milieus in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial South Asia. The Aga Khans, as we have seen, inspired and determined the direction the formation their identity took within this regional context. During the course of the late 19th and 20th centuries, as a result of economic and political pressures, some Khojas left South Asia to settle in other parts of the world, notably East Africa, the UK and North America. Though these diasporic Khoja communities faced a range of issues different from those in the South Asian context, they continued to rely on the guidance of the Aga Khans to help them adapt to these new environments. Through various institutions, the Aga Khans modernized the structure and ethos of the Ismaili Khoja communities, whether in South Asia or abroad, formulating doctrines, religious practices and forms of devotional literature so that they would be aligned with universally accepted idioms of the Islamic tradition, while at the same time reinforcing the core of the Shi'i Ismaili principles of the faith. Commenting on these efforts, Aly Kassam-Remtulla observes that, in addition to asserting the legitimacy of Ismailism within Islam, they were in fact important steps in forging a pan-Ismaili identity.[91]

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We have already remarked on the pan-Ismaili dimension of some of these reforms. For instance, in the 1950s, an Arabic *du'a*, or daily prayer, presenting the doctrine of the Imamate within a framework based on Qur'anic verses, replaced a version which used Indic vernaculars (Gujarati and Sindhi) and drew heavily on the traditional Satpanthi formulations of doctrine. Since this Arabic prayer was introduced among non-Khoja Ismailis as well, it became a ritual commonly shared by Ismaili communities worldwide. We have also remarked how as a result of the reforms, the *farman*s, the directives by which the Aga Khans have guided their followers, eclipsed the *ginan*s as a source of normative doctrine and practice. As *farman*s have become readily accessible through the medium of print, they have become the primary source of religious guidance shared universally by Ismailis. Translations of *farman*s, which are on most occasions given in English, are also available in other important languages spoken by Nizari Ismailis today – Arabic, Persian, Tajik, Urdu, Gujarati, Sindhi and French. A *farman* which the Aga Khan makes in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, may be read in a *jama'atkhana* in Karachi, Mombasa, Toronto or Boston. In the last decades the Ismaili Khojas have come into closer contact with other Ismaili communities throughout the world. As a result they increasingly think of themselves in pan-Ismaili terms.

Historically the Aga Khans have played a key role in transnationalizing Ismaili Khoja identity in many different ways, such as encouraging immigration to different parts of the world when necessary,[92] the evocation of the notion of a worldwide Ismaili 'fraternity', a belief that Ismailis are all brothers and sisters with the Imam as their spiritual father, and the ethic of humanitarian service, that is, the obligation of Ismailis to help others, regardless of their race, nationality or religious persuasion, and that this kind of volunteerism amounts to service to the Imam.[93] More recent efforts in the direction of globalization have included the introduction of *Ta'lim*, a religious and cultural education curriculum designed by The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London for the education of all young Ismailis internationally. Available in several different languages, its curriculum is both pan-Ismaili and pan-Islamic in character.

In the last decade of the 20th century and the opening years of the 21st century, Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, through the institutions of the Aga Khan Development Network and a global constitution, has played a key role in facilitating all kinds of exchanges between Ismailis living in different regions of the world. Such exchanges became even more pronounced after the collapse of the Soviet Union with the establishment of contact with Ismaili communities residing in various Central Asian

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republics, especially Tajikistan, and Afghanistan, as well as Syria and Iran. As a result of these contacts, the Ismaili Khojas have not only become less 'Khoja-centric' in their understandings of Ismaili Islam but are also becoming more familiar with other Ismaili traditions and devotional literatures. As a result of institutional encouragement, it is now increasingly common to hear Ismaili Khojas reciting Persian or Arabic *qasida*s in their *jamaʿatkhana*s. On the other hand, non-Khoja Ismaili communities are also being reshaped by their contacts with certain Khoja customs and practices. Most notable in this regard is the globalization of the offices and the nomenclatures of the *mukhi* and *kamadia*, a quintessentially Khoja institution. These cross-cultural encounters have created a need for the articulation of an Ismaili identity that not only respects regional or local differences in culture and tradition but also recognizes certain universal commonalities in practice and doctrine. The role of Aga Khan IV in negotiating the delicate balance between tradition and modernity, diversity and uniformity, has thus become pivotal.

The increasingly international and cosmopolitan nature of the Ismaili community was given legal recognition in the form of a new constitution which Aga Khan IV ordained on 13 December 1986, his 50th birthday. This constitution was to be in effect for all Ismaili communities worldwide, superseding numerous local or regional ones. It expresses Ismaili identity in pan-Islamic and pan-Ismaili terms. Its preamble reiterates Ismaili doctrines within a universal Islamic framework: the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, as they are formally identified, who affirm the *shahada* (profession of faith), a universal marker of Muslim identity, as well as key Islamic concepts such as *tawhid* (monotheism) and prophecy, including the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad.[94] They acknowledge, like the earlier generations of the Ismailis, the pan-Shiʿa doctrine of the Imamate, specifically Imam ʿAli's authority to interpret and expound on God's final message, the Qur'an, after the Prophet's death, and the continuation of the Imamate by heredity through his direct descendants. Underlining the longstanding connection of Ismaili thought with traditions of Islamic mysticism and esotericism, the Ismailis are characterized as *murid*s belonging to a *tariqa*; they are linked to the Imam by a *bayʿa*, or oath of allegiance; the essential function of the Imam being to illuminate 'the *murid*'s path to spiritual enlightenment and vision'.[95]

Additionally the new constitution emphasizes the transnational identity of the Ismailis through their allegiance to the Imam, as being united with each other and as part of a global brotherhood. It also identifies several international institutions, such as the Leaders International

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Forum, a consultative body consisting of Ismaili leaders from various parts of the world who advise the Imam,[96] and others that form part of the Aga Khan Development Network, established to 'realize the social conscience of Islam' by promoting the social welfare of societies globally.[97] Thus the 1986 constitution marks a significant milestone in Ismaili history, symbolizing the transnationalization process, that is, the emergence of the Ismailis from their local and culturally specific formulations of faith into a global Muslim community sharing a distinctive identity and interpretation of the Islamic faith.

This chapter has attempted to show evolution in the identity and self-image of the Ismaili Khojas of South Asia over the last 150 years. A once tightly knit and closed caste-like community that drew comfortably on a multiplicity of heritages in the early 19th century found its multivalent acculturation a liability when it encountered modernity and the nation-state. The modern urge to categorize and divide based on difference, reflected in the ethos of the colonial and post-colonial nation-state, led to the splintering of the Khojas into various sectarian groups – Muslim and non-Muslim. For those who expressed their loyalty to the Aga Khans, this meant a shift from being merely members of a Satpanthi Khoja caste in western India to *murid*s (disciples) belonging to a *tariqa* of Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims living in over 25 countries around the world. While an institution of British colonial India played a facilitating role in defining in legal terms Khoja identity as being Ismaili, it was the hereditary Islamic institution, the Ismaili Imamate, that navigated the Ismaili Khojas through the whirlpools of cultural and political change in colonial and post-colonial South Asia. In the process, their fluid and multivalent pre-colonial identity was stripped of its traditional Indic plurality and transformed into a modern denominational one. Yet, through their Imams, the Ismaili Khojas entered a new world where they encountered a different kind of plurality – the geographical and cultural diversity of Ismaili communities worldwide. The charismatic authority of the Aga Khans and their vision were crucial to the implementation of monumental changes that impacted not only on religious teachings and practices but also socio-economic life.[98] It is the belief in a living Imam, who can give rulings with complete authority, the cornerstone of the Shi'i identity, that gives the Ismaili Khojas and their fellow Ismailis the world over a unique identity among Muslims today.

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Notes

1. This essay incorporates and builds upon material from a previous article on this subject by the author, 'The Khojas of South Asia: Defining a Space of their Own', *Cultural Dynamics*, 13 (2001), pp. 155–168. The author wishes to thank Michael Currier and Shiraz Hajiani for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.
2. Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins* (London, 1967), p. 138.
3. See Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, tr. R. Mannheim and J. W. Morris (London, 1983).
4. Aga Khan III, *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time* (New York, 1954), p. 24.
5. Farhad Daftary, *The Ismaʿilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 2–3.
6. ʿAta-Malik Juwayni, *Ta'rikh-i jahan-gusha*, tr. J. A. Boyle as *The History of the World-Conqueror* (Cambridge, MA, 1958), vol. 2, p. 723.
7. Paul E. Walker, 'Abu Yaʿqub al-Sijistani and the Development of Ismaili Neoplatonism' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1974), p. 8.
8. Azim Nanji, *The Nizari Ismaʿili Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (Delmar, NY, 1978), p. 132.
9. For interfacing of some Ismaili and Jewish ideas in Fatimid Egypt, see J. Kraemer, *Maimonides. The Life and World of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds* (New York, 2008), p. 158.
10. W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran, 1963), p. 11.
11. For a contextual approach to understanding Satpanth and the Nizari Ismaili tradition, see Ali Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia* (London, 2002), pp. 1–24.
12. Faisal Devji, 'Conversion to Islam: The Khojas' (unpublished paper, University of Chicago, 1987), p. 49.
13. According to Nizari Ismaili belief, the Aga Khans hold authority as Imams by virtue of being descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima and son-in-law ʿAli ibn Abi Talib. Aga Khan III and Aga Khan IV are acknowledged as, respectively, the 48th and 49th Imams in direct descent from the Prophet.
14. Nanji, *Nizari Ismaʿili Tradition*, pp. 72–77.
15. Wladimir Ivanow, 'Khodja', in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers (Leiden, 1953), p. 256. Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali questions this commonly accepted derivation of the title Khoja but does not offer a reasonable alternative. He also claims that it was first used by Pir Satgur (*ca*. 11th century); see his 'Meaning of Khoja', in the *Encyclopaedia of Ismailism* (Karachi, 2006), p. 359.
16. J. C. Masselos, 'The Khojas of Bombay: The Defining of Formal Membership Criteria during the Nineteenth Century', in I. Ahmad, ed., *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India* (New Delhi, 1973), pp. 1–20; and

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